

Top 5 Weather Events in the NWS Blacksburg Forecast Area for 2011

The following are the top five weather events in 2011 across the NWS Blacksburg forecast area as voted by the staff of the Blacksburg National Weather Service Office:

1. (Tie): The April 27th-28th Tornado Outbreak.

From April 25th through April 28th, 2011 there were 343 tornadoes across the Midwest, Ohio Valley and the Southeast United States, which resulted in 321 deaths. Sadly, one of these fatalities occurred in the NWS Blacksburg forecast area when a tornado killed a woman in Halifax County on the evening of April 27th. This was the first death directly related to a tornado in our forecast area since 1998, when two people lost their lives in Stoneville, NC.

This was also the first tornado related fatality in the 27 counties in Virginia for which the NWS Blacksburg office is responsible since 1969.

The Halifax County tornado was one of four tornadoes that were confirmed in our forecast area during this event. Other tornado touchdowns occurred in Botetourt, and Smyth Counties. One of the two tornadoes in Smyth County occurred at Grindstone campground at an elevation of around 4,000 feet, dispelling the myth that tornadoes cannot occur in high elevation areas.



Figure 1. Tornado damage along Liberty Road in Halifax County. Photo Courtesy VA State Police.

More information about the April 27th-28th tornado outbreak can be found here:
http://www.erh.noaa.gov/rnk/events/2011/April27_outbreak/summary.php

1. (Tie): The Pulaski and Draper tornadoes of April 8th.

On the evening of April 8th, an EF2 tornado carved a path of damage through the town of Pulaski, injuring 9 people. Just a few minutes later, an EF1 tornado moved through the town of Draper, injuring one person. Damage from these two tornadoes was estimated to be 5.25 million dollars.

Official weather records for tornadoes date back to 1950. Prior to these two tornadoes, there had never been a tornado documented in Pulaski County. This should serve as a reminder that tornadoes can occur anywhere no matter how infrequent they have been in the past.



Figure 2. Tornado near the Town of Pulaski. Photo Courtesy Dakota Burton.

More information about these tornadoes can be found here:
http://www.erh.noaa.gov/rnk/events/2011/April_8th_Tornadoes/summary.php

3 The June 21st, 2011 Severe Weather Outbreak.

Severe thunderstorms pounded the NWS Blacksburg Forecast area from the early afternoon on the 21st of June through the evening. During this 8 hour event, our office received 78 reports of severe weather. This was the greatest number of severe weather reports for one event in 2011. The majority of severe weather reports were wind damage, but large hail also fell in some spots.

4. The April 16th Tornado Outbreak.

Another outbreak of tornadoes in April of 2011 occurred on April 16th and 17th. During this time, 177 tornadoes were noted in the central and southern United States. Three of these tornadoes occurred in the NWS Blacksburg forecast area.

The first tornado touched down in Rockbridge County near Vesuvius and was on the ground for over a mile. This was the first confirmed tornado in Rockbridge County since 1975.

The second tornado occurred in Caswell County near Jericho damaging 10 homes.

The final tornado in our area was confirmed in Halifax County. This was the strongest of the three tornadoes with an EF2 rating, with maximum wind speeds estimated to be 120 MPH, and was on the ground for a remarkable 26 miles (16.6 in Halifax County) The tornado destroyed an estimated 60 to 100 acres of trees in Staunton River State Park.



Figure 3. Tornado Damage at Staunton River State Park. Photo Courtesy Southside Messenger Newspaper.

More information regarding the April 16th tornadoes can be found here:
http://www.erh.noaa.gov/rnk/events/2011/April16th_Tornadoes/summary.php

5. The Labor Day Tornadoes

Yet another multiple tornado event makes our top 5 list. On Labor Day, two tornadoes were confirmed. The first was in Wilkes County, NC, where an EF1 tornado with estimated maximum wind speeds of 100 to 105 miles per hour struck near the town of Abshers. Several outbuildings were destroyed and three homes damaged.

The second tornado briefly touched down near the town of Cana in Carroll County. Here, two people received minor injuries when an EF0 tornado with maximum winds estimated to be 80 MPH, struck a gas station blowing off the roof.



Figure 4. Tornado Damage near Cana. Photo from NWS Storm Survey.

More information about the Labor Day tornadoes can be found here:
http://www.erh.noaa.gov/rnk/news/pnsrnk_sept06_2011.txt